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ON PAGE A 7

NEW YORK TIMES
17 December 1984

CUBAN ORGANIZING A GUERRILLA UNIT

Exile Leader Says the Group
Will Help Rebels Fighting
Against Sandinistas

By LARRY ROHTER

A Cuban exile leader says he has begun organizing a permanent Cuban exile detachment to fight alongside Nicaraguan rebels seeking the overthrow of the Sandinista Government.

The exile leader, Huber Matos, a close associate of Fidel Castro in the Cuban Revolution who later broke with him and spent two decades in prison, said in a telephone interview Friday that "we are undertaking an effort to assure a permanent presence of Cuban combatants from our movement at their side."

He added, "This is also our war, since they, like us, are fighting against Castro and the Russians."

Mr. Matos said he had just returned to the United States after six weeks on the Honduras-Nicaragua border with the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest and most active of the groups fighting the Managua Government.

'About 50 Fighters'

Initially, Mr. Matos said, the Cuban exile unit will consist of "about 50 fighters." He said volunteers would be drawn from Cuban-American veterans of the United States Army as well as from former guerrillas who served under him in Cuba.

Mr. Matos, 66 years old, is a former schoolteacher who became prominent as one of the most daring and skilled of the guerrilla commanders who fought alongside Castro in the mid-1950's.

After Castro seized power in January 1959, Mr. Matos he was appointed Military Governor of Camaguey Province.

In October 1959, Mr. Matos resigned in protest against what he said was growing Communist influence in the Cuban Government and armed forces. Days later, he was arrested on treason charges and sentenced to prison after a court martial in which the main witness against him was Castro.

Mr. Matos spent 20 years in Cuban jails. After his release in 1979, he came to the United States and emerged as a leading anti-Castro activist.

'A Good Opportunity'

Early in November, Mr. Matos left for Central America on what he called "a mission of solidarity" in support of the anti-Sandinista forces. He was accompanied by four associates.

"The war the F.D.N. is fighting is completely different from the one we fought in the Sierra Maestra," he said. "This is a good opportunity for us to bring our knowledge of guerrilla warfare up to date."

A Matos associate, Mario Villar Róces, said Mr. Matos was "carrying his message to the guerrillas and the peasants, talking of his experience as a combatant and what it is like to have a regime that appears to be democratic and then passes on to something else."

Mr. Matos says he accompanied rebel forces on missions into Nueva Segovia and Jinotega Provinces in northern Nicaragua.

James Adair, a contributing editor to the military action magazine *Eagle*, who recently spent three weeks with the rebels on the Honduras-Nicaragua border, said in an interview last week that he saw Mr. Matos armed and leaving a rebel base camp as part of a special "task force."

Mr. Matos, he said, "looked like Don Quixote riding off into the mist. He had an AK-47 slung across his shoulder and fire in his eyes."

Mr. Matos said he had not carried arms. He said he left the guerrillas last week, at their request, to begin a campaign of support for their military effort. Nicaraguan Democratic Force leaders have recently complained that Congressional restrictions on covert United States aid have hurt them and limited their activities.

In the past, much of the money and supplies for the Nicaraguan Democratic Force and other anti-Sandinista groups has come from the Central Intelligence Agency. But Mr. Matos said his group was not acting as a conduit for the C.I.A. or at its behest.

"We are totally independent and have never received even one cent from the U.S. Government or any of its official agencies," he said. "We have absolutely nothing to do with the C.I.A."

Mr. Matos said he planned to rejoin the Nicaraguan rebels as soon as he finishes the fund-raising trip.